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ABSTRACT

According to beginning teachers, early phases of actual classroom practice involve a uniformly characteristic and decidedly intense preoccupation with their professional or preprofessional performance. Support for this view is offered by an educator-trainer and practicing psychologist who have adapted cognitive coping techniques and developed a practice script to reduce situational anxiety among beginning teachers. Together, they model a collaborative clinical training session designed to train novice teachers in anxiety reduction. Anxiety reducing techniques include a basic relaxation procedure, an imagery relaxation format, and guidance on defusing criticism by "fogging." (Author/JD)

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Training Strategies:
New Teachers Can Cope

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Abstract

According to beginning teachers themselves, early phases of actual classroom practice involve a uniformly characteristic and decidely intense preoccupation with their professional or preprofessional performance. Support for this view is offered by an educator-trainer and a practicing psychologist who have adapted cognitive coping techniques and developed a practice script to reduce situational anxiety among beginning teachers. Together, they model a collaborative clinical training session designed to introduce and practice novice teachers in anxiety reduction.

INTRODUCTION

I. Problematic Concerns of Beginning Teachers. Not only student teachers, but also first year teachers, frequently report considerable stress stemming from their professional or preprofessional responsibilities. In particular, a number of investigations focusing on the professional concerns of inexperienced educators report that these anxieties are attributable to such issues a maintaining control of classroom situations and perceived inadequacies regarding mastery and comprehensive knowledge of specialty areas, as well as subjecting themselves to scrutiny and evaluation by supervising college faculty, cooperating and other more experienced teachers in community schools and by the very pupils being taught (Brooks, 1985: Curtis and Bennett, 1981). Fuller (1969), summarizing the results of ten such investigations, emphasized that such complaints of job-related stress by the individuals interviewed were a universally common finding. This singularly pertinent result is all the more remarkable and significant in light of two facts: (1) the demographically diverse nature of the individuals interviewed and (2) the various studies reviewed by Fuller were conducted over a period of 36 years.

According, then, to these beginning educators themselves, early phases of actual classroom responsibilities involve a uniformly characteristic and decidedly intense preoccupation with their professional or preprofessional performance. Such concerns may assume both covert and overt forms. In her 1969 review of the literature, Fuller reports that novice, developing teachers question both themselves and significant authority figures: for example, "Where do I stand?" and "How adequate am I?"

However, one question new teachers apparently ask too infrequently is "What can I do about my concerns?" As teacher educators, we are becoming increasingly aware of the intensity of the concerns, reality-based or otherwise, exhibited by our

students regarding self-adequacy and self-evaluation. Certainly one of our more crucial professional responsibilities in nurturing the development of future educators is providing the emotional support necessary to successfully cope with these potentially debilitating apperceptions in order that our students may focus directly and increasingly effectively on the more global, pragmatic issues of becoming professional educators. In other words, not only must we assist them in allaying their anxieties by further instilling the abilities to learn and understand specific content areas, to anticipate, prevent or formulate viable solutions to problems before they escalate to more unmanageable levels and to recognize the need for methodological changes should their approaches to teaching prove ineffectual, but also by preparing them to accept, interpret and utilize constructive criticism appropriately as well as to dissociate useful information from the possible biases of the evaluators providing feedback.

II. Solving the Problems: Cognitive Intervention. Cognitive intervention, or CI, is a relatively novel development in the successful psychological treatment of a broad spectrum of anxieties and kindred emotional disorders. Practitioners of CI come from diverse theoretical orientations and clinical training backgrounds, and it is hardly surprising that this diversity is itself reflected in the clinical approaches, techniques and skills they employ in providing treatment (Ritter, 1985). In fact, upon reviewing the literature, it appears that the lack of a common terminology is virtually a defining characteristic of cognitive intervention! Consider the following examples: Kendall and Hallon (1979) discussed "cognitive-behavioral interventions," Meichenbaum (1977) referred to "cognitive-behavior modification," and Mahoney (1974) employed the terms "cognitive therapy" and "cognitive behavior modification" interchangeably. Nevertheless, the unifying characteristic in the clinical practice of CI appears

to be the focus of therapy on the thinking and cognitive processes (e.g., self-evaluations, belief systems, and personal expectancies) of clients.

Our working hypothesis was that the anxieties typically voiced by our undergraduates involved in student teaching would be significantly reduced or perhaps even eliminated by coping skill training involving cognitive intervention techniques. A teacher-educator and a clinical psychologist served as co-therapists both prior to and during the student teaching experience. A team consisting of a psychologist-therapist and a teacher-educator collaborate in indentifying a beginning teacher's specific anxieties and in modeling effective coping skills (either on an individual basis or in small group settings), as well as encouraging students to implement the techniques modeled during their practicum experiences.

METHODOLOGY

In establishing the need for training our beginning student teachers in cognitive techniques facilitating anxiety reduction, we analyzed verbatim transcripts of taped interviews. Each statement in the transcripts of six students were classified on the basis of its main topic. Prior to participating in the interviews, these students received guarantees regarding anonymity and confidentially of individual interviews, and were informed that the team members were interested in indentifying their critical concerns about the impending student teaching semester.

Rather than classifying the content of the interviews according to some preconceived, a priori set of critical categories, a set of topical categories, was inductively derived from the content of transcripts themselves. Two

judges classified the student's statements and resolved any differences in classification by conferring until they agreed. Illustrative examples of "student-generated" statements of questions relating to "self" as broadly defined and the fears elicited by or otherwise related to their field experiences include:

(1) "How can I be an effective authority figure when I am so close in age to my students?"

(2) "Sometimes I get so upset the night before I'm supposed to be in charge that I throw up!"

(3) "I worry so much that I can't sleep the night before, and then I'm all jittery!"

(4) "I overprepare when I'm supposed to teach, and then I have too much stuff to do!"

(5) "You need more than methods, you need to be on you own."

(6) "What if I get a bad evaluation? What will happen to me?"

(7) "I tend to do better under pressure, but sometimes the pressure is too great! When will I stop worrying?"

(8) "I'm overorganized, kind of compulsive. How will I (be able to) keep it up, when I see all the things teachers (have to) do?"

(9) "Sometimes I worry about not being sympathetic enough. Maybe I should go to work for Proctor & Gamble!"

(10) "I'm so self-critical, never take the time to compliment myself. I depend on others to compliment me. Will I be able to motivate them?"

(11) "The evaluation is so cold; I never do as well when someone is watching!"

A second set of exploratory interviews with the novice teachers is scheduled after the six have completed one week in their practicum experience. Two of the six practice teachers will have participated in one introductory CI training session. Questions we hope to answer include: (1) Are second interview statements generated predominantly "self-statements"? (2) Will a greater number of "pupil

performance"statements be generated? (3) Were the coping techniques introduced in the training session used by the two participating students in order to reduce anxiety during the crucial first week of student teaching?

Table 1 shows the relevant first interview data. Topical categories, frequency of statements generated and percentages for the total number of statements produced are given for six teachers.

Insert Table 1 here

Table 1 shows the data for six student teachers. Of the 145 generated statements 125 were anxiety related "self concerned" statements or questions. An average of 20.8 "self concerned" statements per subject were produced. The number of statements per subject ranged from a low of 6 (subject 4) to a high of 37 (subject 1). "Self-concerned" statements represent 86.2% of the total statements generated by all subjects. Although 20 of the total statements or 14% were "pupil performance related only three of the six subjects offered such statements. Thus, the decidedly intense preoccupation of the beginning teachers with their own performance shows little carry over to questioning how their performance affects pupil gain? A second set of interviews, planned for later in the student teaching semester, will explore shifts in topical categories that may occur after initial anxieties subside.

TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Prior to student teaching three anxiety reducing techniques were demonstrated and practiced by 8 preservice teachers. The techniques selected for demonstration and practice are not only simple, but potentially applicable to a variety of teaching situations.

Training exercises include:

(A). A basic relaxation procedure.

(B). An imagery relaxation script.

(C). Fogging: defusing criticism

Appendices A, B, and C offer directions, sample activities and a script.

CONCLUSIONS

During the later phase of practicum and, indeed, during the first year of professional practice the beginning teacher is expected to draw from a wide repertoire of techniques and required to implement teaching strategies typically well-rehearsed in college education classes. However, the singularly pertinent topic of taped interviews, at least in our own sample, confirm what we already expected as characteristic of the beginning teacher, that is, their decidedly intense preoccupation with their own feelings and performance.

To a great extent teacher educators alone are responsible for providing the support necessary to assist novices as they make the transition from the beginning to the later stage in student teaching. If, as the literature suggests, the pragmatic-centered concerns appear only after self-concerns are resolved, assisting novice teachers to cope with anxiety needs to be viewed as an important teacher training function. Yet, teacher educators, generally well practiced in pedagogy may well founder when required to act as trained counselors. As we help new teachers cope with their potentially debilitating apperceptions the clinical knowledge and skills provided by the CI trained counselor may well complement the skills of the teacher educator.

Models for assisting beginning teachers to cope with the intensity of their concerns will differ based upon institutional resources and availability of trained personnel. Although our work is currently exploratory, statements of Marietta College novice student teachers appear to confirm the need for treatment to ameliorate the difficulty. Work in fields other than education as well as the experience of psychologists in clinical practice illustrate the positive affects of cognitive interventions. Although we are presently lacking in hard data and have not yet had the opportunity to implement an ongoing treatment program,

our pilot work holds out at least tentative hope that through collaboration and the use of cognitive intervention strategies a broad spectrum of anxieties reported by our beginning teachers may be reduced.

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TABLE 1

INITIAL INTERVIEW STATEMENTS

Subjects	Self Statements	% TSS	Pupil Statements	% TPS	Total Statements	% TS
1	37	29.6	3	15	40	27.60
2	29	23.2	0	0	29	20.00
3	21	16.8	13	65	34	23.44
4	6	4.8	0	0	6	4.13
5	18	14.4	4	20	22	15.17
6	14	11.2	0	0	14	9.70
Total	125	100	20	100	145	100.04

APPENDIX A DEEP BREATHING

Deep breathing is a basic relaxation method easily practiced at nearly any time. Breathing deeply helps reduce anxiety and it increases our energy and our feelings of confidence and control.

As a teacher, you can use changes in your schedule to cue taking deep breaths. Start by noticing your normal breathing. Now, imagine your lungs as a balloon. Let the the balloon be a color you find relaxing yet energizing. Start to breathe slowly, picturing your "balloon" filling with air from the bottom up. When your lungs feel full, hold it. Then, gradually let the air escape. Hold it. Repeat.

You may experience some slight discomfort as you begin. This means that your recent pattern of breathing has probably been quite shallow. Deep breathing will feel more comfortable with practice.

PRACTICE: You can practice taking deep breaths many times a day (such as every hour on the hour, or each time classes change), or once or twice take 10 to 20 deep breaths. Practicing at bedtime can reduce or eliminate difficulty falling asleep, especially when combined with rhymical imagery.

PRACTICE CHECK: To check on the fullness of your breath, place your hands over your diaphram with the tall fingers touching. Now take a deep breath. If you filled the lungs properly (from the bottom up) your fingers will pop apart shortly after you begin.

VARIATION: You may wish to combine deep breathing with a yoga stretch. Stand erect. Bend over, then inhale slowly and fully as you stretch upward toward the sky. Then let all the air out in a "whish!" -- as you bend toward the ground. Repeat two times.

Teach these breathing techniques to the students who need ways to energize themselves after periods of sitting and concentrating.

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APPENDIX B IMAGERY RELAXATION SCRIPT

Use for new teachers: To increase their confidence and reduce maladaptive levels of anxiety as they begin their teaching.

Read the script, pausing after each sentence for a few seconds. Make yourself comfortable. Reduce any noticeable muscle tension. Close your eyes. Breathe slowly and deeply. Allow yourself to let go. Allow yourself to relax. Let the relaxation deepen. You will reach a level of relaxation where images can flow freely.

Allow an image to come to your mind of the classroom where you will be beginning your teaching. Picture yourself in the classroom. Picture yourself with the children_____

_____

(be specific--standing, in a chair, with a group on the floor, etc.)

Notice details-- if you have met the children, their faces looking up with their eyes connected to yours, desks, chairs, how they are arranged, floor covering, window treatment, pictures, windows, bulletin boards, etc._____

_____

See yourself functioning in the picture--feeling confident, warm, comfortable. You are supremely in control. You are filled with positive energy that allows you to be a magnet. You are aware of the difficulties and stressors but you know you can handle the situation.

Imagine the situation_____
(being observed, only part of the

_____

class attending, dealing with conflict, confronting a colleague)

See yourself in control. Take some deep breaths to increase your feeling of calm. Notice that you are warm and relaxed. Give yourself a positive message about the situation_____

_____

Continue visualizing the situation saying to yourself "I am behaving calmly, competently and with confidence". Now the class period is coming to an end. Picture it vividly. The students are happy to have spent time with you. They are pleased with what has occurred.

Now your colleague is approaching you and congratulating you on a job well done. See yourself being congratulated and congratulate yourself for successfully achieving your goal of success in the classroom. Take a few moments to enjoy the positive feelings.

APPENDIX C FOGGING: DEFUSING CRITICISM

Fogging is a C.I. technique for reducing the anxiety aroused by anticipating being criticized or being observed.

Preparation: Describe the usual reaction to criticism: defensiveness. To defend can be likened to being a brick wall. The defending individual becomes tense, tight, and rigid. This allows the critic to bounce criticism of the brick wall, keeping the anxiety provoking state of affairs going and making a wound in the wall if it is intense enough.

A better way to behave is to think of one's self as a fog bank. An object thrown at a fog bank will sail through neither leaving scars nor providing the opportunity for bouncing the criticism back to be picked up and thrown again. By fogging, you defuse potentially troublesome situations.

To fog, we may agree with the criticism, agree with part of criticism, or with motive behind the criticism. For example:

1) Critic: "You weren't very well organized today."
Defender: "I spend hours preparing. I felt I was organized."
Fogger: "Perhaps I could have been better organized by dropping the last activity."

2) Critic: "You missed the point in teaching that lesson None of the students understood the concept."
Defender: "I thought I gave a simple explanation."
Fogger: "I could have done better. Perhaps I should have used more concrete examples. Can you suggest how that would have worked?"

3) Respond to an observer non-defensively.
Defender: I perceive that I'm being judged.
Fogger: I believe I'm being supported, appreciated.
Critic: You really think you can change things?
Defender: If these teachers can't, how can I expect miracles?
Fogger: If I believe good things will happen, I will move in the direction of my thoughts.

4) Content Criticism
"You mispronounced that word. You should have learned that before now. (You have a strong background in history-you mispronounced _____ and _____)"
Defender: I'm working hard. I can't do everything.
Fogger: Yes, I did make a mistake. This is a learning experience for me. Perhaps you can direct me to appropriate responses.